

Northumbria University

Coach Lane Campus
Coach Lane
Newcastle Upon Tyne
NE7 7XA

A further education teacher training
inspection report
2006/07

Managing Inspector
Vincent Ashworth HMI

Crown copyright 2007. This report may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date are stated.

Inspection reports are available on the Ofsted web site (www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The inspection

1. The inspection was carried out in accordance with the Framework for the inspection of initial training of further education (FE) teachers and the guidance in the Handbook for the inspection of initial training of further education teachers, both published in 2004. It was conducted in two phases by Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and Additional Inspectors. During the first phase which took place in November 2006, inspectors focused on the quality of training and management and quality assurance procedures. In the second phase, inspectors evaluated the achievements of FE trainees through observing their teaching and gathering evidence of their progress during the course. Phase 2 of the inspection was completed in June 2007.

Background

2. Northumbria University has a long-standing tradition of delivering qualifications in initial teacher education across primary, secondary and post-compulsory phases. Provision to prepare trainees to teach in the learning and skills sector comprises a 2-year part-time in-service course which leads either to the professional graduate certificate in education (PGCE), or the diploma in higher education (Certificate of Education) in post compulsory education and training (PCET). Both courses satisfy the Secretary of State's requirements for further education (FE) teacher education. Trainees can attend 26 weekly sessions of three hours on a given evening, or 13 whole day sessions on alternate weeks. In 2006-07 there were around 130 trainees enrolled on initial teacher education courses. The majority of trainees come from training providers and public services, with significant number of police trainers. A high proportion of trainees teach voluntarily in community organisations and charities. Relatively few trainees are employed in FE colleges. The university also offers subject specialist qualifications in adult literacy and numeracy. A number of trainees study for these qualifications at the same time as undertaking initial teacher education. The university is a designated Centre for Excellence in Teacher Training (CETT).

Effectiveness of provision

3. The overall quality of provision is good (grade 2). Trainees are highly motivated and succeed in making good progress in both their pedagogic and academic development. The quality of their reflective practice is high. Many trainees use the Cert Ed/PGCE as a platform to move on to other courses which can enhance their professional development. Given the voluntary and short-term nature of their teaching, too many trainees do not gain sufficient breadth of experience across all aspects of the FE teacher role. The quality of training at the university is high and the extent to which literacy and numeracy subject specialisms are developed on the course is good. Trainees benefit from good personal support. Individual needs are systematically assessed, diagnosed and meticulously monitored

through each trainee's development file. Mentors are supportive but their contributions lack formality and many are unclear about their role in assessing trainees' progress. Provision is well-led and managed and self-evaluation is effective. The university has been very successful in engaging with partners to ensure that teacher education courses are accessible and highly responsive to local needs.

Key strengths

Inspectors identified the following strengths:

- highly motivated and confident trainees
- trainees' very effective critical reflection on their own practice
- very successful delivery of the minimum core curriculum
- good personal support for trainees
- highly responsive and inclusive provision
- well structured admissions and interview procedures
- strong leadership and management
- effective self-evaluation that results in improvement.

Areas for attention

The partnership should address:

- insufficient opportunities for trainees to extend their experience across broader aspects of teaching and learning in the FE sector
- wide variation in trainees' experience of mentoring
- trainees' lack of engagement with the university's virtual learning environment (VLE)
- insufficient monitoring and review of the quality and impact of mentoring arrangements.

Further information on strengths and areas for attention is contained in the substantial sections of the report that follow.

Achievement of trainees

4. Trainees are enthusiastic, highly motivated and bring a very wide range of experiences to their training. Many trainees benefit from the wider staff development and enrichment opportunities offered to them within their organisations. They make good use of continuing professional development to enhance their emerging teaching and learning skills. Many have been inspired to progress on to higher levels of study, either at foundation degree or masters level. A number of trainees also follow courses leading to Skills for Life specialist qualifications at the same time as studying on the Cert Ed/PGCE. The vast majority demonstrate a good understanding of the professional values associated with teaching in the learning and skills sector. This is made evident through the high expectations they set for their learners and the support they provide to enable learners to achieve. With very few exceptions trainees make good progress.

5. Trainees develop very well as reflective practitioners. They update their professional development journals systematically. They are thorough in identifying both their strengths and weaknesses and make good use of positive criticism to improve their practice. Most trainees' evaluations of their lessons are incisive and appropriately self-critical. Support from tutors and feedback on their assignments helps them to improve their study skills and enhances their overall professional development. All trainees observed by inspectors were able to explain and provide clear evidence of the progress they had made since they started the course.

6. Trainees are well-qualified in their specialist subject or vocational area. However, the extent to which they are able to develop their subject pedagogy is very variable, as they often have to rely on voluntary and informal mentoring arrangements in the workplace. Where trainees teach Skills for Life subjects they do so very competently, because of the good attention given to these specialisms on the taught aspect of the training.

7. Trainees are well organised and prepare thoroughly for their lessons. Learning objectives in lesson plans are carefully thought out and achievable. In planning their lessons, trainees give good consideration to the needs of learners with specific learning difficulties and/or disabilities. They are less skilled in considering how their teaching can ensure that learners of all levels of ability will be able to play a full and active role in lessons. For example, trainees do not give sufficient attention to challenging the more able learners, other than by offering them more of the same level of work to complete.

8. Learning resources prepared by trainees are imaginative and of good quality. Many trainees are able to take risks to make their lessons engaging and are successful in capturing their learners' imagination. In one adult literacy lesson, the trainee deliberately avoided standard worksheets, preferring to draw on real life resources, such as an estate agents' sales literature to demonstrate the nuances in the use of language. Trainees are able to draw on a repertoire of teaching strategies to ensure their lessons have sufficient variety and pace to keep their students on track. Trainees make good use of information and communication technology (ICT)

to stimulate interest and to support learning. The 'Barriers to Learning' conference, held at the university, has helped trainees to demonstrate how they can address equality and diversity issues through their own teaching and learning methods.

9. Typically, trainees make good use of praise and encouragement to get their students to try things for themselves and to develop independent learning skills. They are less skilled in using questioning techniques to check on individuals' learning in lessons; they frequently direct their questions to the whole class rather than target them to individuals.

10. Most trainees have a good understanding of how they can develop their students' language, literacy and numeracy skills through teaching their specialist subjects. In one lesson observed, the trainee took great care to help learners experiencing difficulties with their spelling by encouraging them to break words down to determine the sequence of letters.

11. Trainees demonstrate a good understanding of the requirements of the national awarding body courses they teach. Many have developed these skills further by gaining qualifications to assess and internally verify National Vocational Qualifications. However, few trainees gain sufficient breadth of experience across a range of assessment techniques. Where trainees are not teaching on courses leading to a qualification, or their teaching is voluntary they gain little practice, if any, in summative assessment or in monitoring student progress over time. The university is acutely aware of the need to extend trainees' experience across wider aspects of FE teaching and there are appropriate plans to address this through the CETT partnership. Trainees provide a high standard of care and support for their learners. They establish a strong rapport with their learners, many of whom are lacking in confidence and self-esteem.

Quality of training

12. Training is well-planned and managed effectively. The course structure and the assessment schedule provide many opportunities for trainees to integrate both the theoretical and practical aspects of their learning. Even though there is a strong focus on adult learning, course content also extends to providing trainees with a good understanding of other key developments, for example the 14-19 curriculum and the needs of younger learners. One particularly strong feature of the course structure is the first module which is designed as an induction module and focuses on study skills. This is particularly effective in meeting the needs of the high proportion of trainees either returning to study after a period of time, or who have never experienced higher level study. Data on trainees' retention indicate that all those who successfully complete the first module also stay on to successfully complete the full qualification.

13. The course has been developed in response to local needs and has been designed in particular to meet the needs of trainees working with adult learners in a

range of settings. As a result there is a very strong focus on the coverage of adult basic skills. The delivery is very flexible enabling trainees to attend either in the evening or during the day. If trainees miss a session they are encouraged to attend the alternative evening or day if possible.

14. The university provides very helpful and comprehensive course documentation. This presents trainees with a clear outline of course content, what they will learn and how their learning will be assessed, both practically in the workplace and academically through course assignments. The content of the course encourages trainees progressively to develop their teaching skills.

15. A key strength of this provision is the extent to which the minimum core curriculum has been embedded within the taught elements and integrated within the assessment schedule. As a result, trainees develop a good understanding of the issues and barriers experienced by learners with literacy and numeracy difficulties. Furthermore, trainees are able to articulate how the content of the minimum core curriculum has enhanced both their own personal and professional development.

16. The quality of taught sessions is good and in some cases very good. Trainers are well qualified, understand their roles and responsibilities and work extremely well as a team. Members of the course team all undertake some aspect of work in the further education sector in addition to their training at the university. They draw on this experience well to make their sessions topical, stimulating and fun. Trainees particularly value the fact that their trainers are up to date with current practice. Trainers use a wide range of teaching methods and often encourage trainees to reflect on the reasons why they might have selected a particular method and how this has impacted on learning during the session. Trainees bring a wealth of experience to the sessions and trainers are particularly effective in drawing on this experience to illustrate the theoretical and conceptual aspects of the session. Course reviews demonstrate the value trainees place on opportunities to share good practice in training sessions and to learn from each other. Trainers draw effectively on wider educational research and frequently direct trainees to further reading and additional learning resources. As a result, trainees make good progress in developing both their research and academic writing skills.

17. The standard of training accommodation is high and rooms are suitably equipped with ICT resources which are used effectively to promote and reinforce trainees' learning. The university library offers a wealth of learning resources; however a minority of trainees do not make sufficient use of these. Occasionally, trainees complete the course without ever joining the library. The university's virtual learning environment (VLE) provides useful on-line learning resources and journals. However this is not well-utilised by either trainees or their mentors routinely to enhance learning or to create a virtual on-line community. This has particular significance for those trainees and mentors located in remote areas. Following phase 1 of the inspection the university took steps to remove some of the technical barriers to accessing the VLE. However there are insufficient opportunities within the course itself to encourage trainees and their mentors to engage with the technology.

18. A thorough and comprehensive induction programme ensures that trainees' prior experiences, knowledge and skills are assessed before they start the course. All trainees undertake a numeracy and literacy assessment which is discussed with them. Trainees self-assess in relation to each of the modules throughout the programme. Trainees' self-assessment is carefully monitored and recorded and this forms part of the final assessment. During the course of the inspection the university introduced a trainee development file as a means of drawing together all aspects of the programme that record trainees' learning, reflective practice and progress. This has proven to be an effective means of structuring the interaction between trainers, mentors and trainees in monitoring and documenting the extent to which trainees' needs are met and how well they are acquiring skills in both generic and subject specific pedagogy.

19. There is good take up of additional learning support including literacy, numeracy and ICT. Trainees speak highly of the support they receive which is well suited to their individual needs. Additional sessions on literacy and numeracy are available to trainees as well as access to wider support arrangements within the university. Trainees are also encouraged to make use of other support available to them, for example local Skills for Life provision within their own organisations.

20. Attempts to develop a framework to support subject-specific mentoring in the workplace have not been wholly successful. All trainees have been allocated a mentor and they speak very highly of the informal support and encouragement they receive from their mentors. However, in too many instances mentors are also their trainee's line manager. As a consequence, the boundaries between performance management and developmental coaching become blurred. A comprehensive mentor pack is available which provides mentors with clear guidance on their role and tasks. Although training has been offered the take-up has been very poor and many mentors lack clarity about what is expected of them.

21. Assessment arrangements are appropriate and well documented. Assessment tasks are varied, appropriate and suitably phased throughout the course. Assignments consolidate well trainees' learning at different stages of the course. They provide good opportunities for trainees to explore aspects of FE in the context of their specialist subjects. Marking is rigorous and an appropriate sample of trainees' work is double marked by the course team. Constructive feedback is provided on lesson observations, course tasks and assignments and clearly outlines what trainees must do to improve. The extent to which mentors engage with and are confident in the assessment of trainees' practical teaching is highly variable. In some instances mentors are not sufficiently clear about how to grade the teaching practice they observe and their feedback tends to focus on generic issues.

Management and quality assurance of provision

22. Admissions processes are well documented and appropriate selection procedures are in place. Direct entry to year 2 is possible for trainees who have completed year 1 equivalent courses elsewhere. Trainees who do join year 2 are provided with a thorough induction which helps them to settle into further study very quickly.

23. Prospective trainees gain a clear understanding of the requirements of the programme and the need for them to be able to access the required number of teaching hours. During the interview process applicants also undertake a very thorough diagnostic assessment of their literacy and numeracy skills. The outcomes of this assessment are then used extensively throughout the programme to ensure teaching and learning is matched well to individual needs.

24. Applicants complete a written commentary prior to starting the course. This outlines their aspirations, experience and provides trainers with background information on trainees' levels of competence in literacy and ICT. A helpful handout is provided which guides applicants on how to approach the activity, with tips on presentation and key texts they might refer to in associated research. Course handbooks are well-designed and fit for purpose.

25. There is a commitment to equality of opportunity and the course team is starting to make better use of equality and diversity impact measures to evaluate the quality of provision. The university's very active approach to establishing links and partnerships with a wide range of organisations and community groups, has proved very successful in removing barriers to teacher education for a number of its trainees. The overall commitment to educational and social inclusion is very strong. The profile of trainees on entry records a very wide range of ability and prior experience. Success rates are high and the majority of trainees achieve their potential.

26. Minutes of course team meetings and other records underpin efficient and highly effective course management. Staff development opportunities for teacher educators are good. There has been a deliberate re-formulation of the course team's skills base. For example all members of the course team are skilled practitioners in Skills for Life and work with ease across both the generic teacher education course and the subject specialist qualifications. This cross-fertilisation of skills and experience has ensured that trainees working within a Skills for Life context make particularly good progress in developing their subject specialism.

27. Review and evaluation procedures are comprehensive and result in improvement. The School of Health, Community and Education Studies has an over-arching improvement plan which places the Every Child Matters (ECM) agenda as a key priority across all programmes in the department. As a result, ECM issues are given a high profile on the course and trainees have a good understanding of safeguarding matters as they relate to young people and vulnerable adults.

28. Trainees' comments on course module evaluations are reviewed throughout the year and actions taken reported through the end of year course review. The course committee, which has student representation, provides further opportunity for trainees to voice their views about the course. Quality assurance processes have led to improvements; for example improved module guides, better teaching accommodation and the delivery of literacy and numeracy subject pedagogy through taught sessions on generic courses.

29. The course team also self-evaluates provision against the Ofsted inspection framework. This results in a broader consideration of the extent to which university provision is meeting the requirements of the national reforms in FE teacher education. The course manager has an accurate view of strengths and weaknesses of provision and is clear that further improvement needs to be directed on mentoring and the quality of trainees' development in the workplace.

30. The external examiner samples a range of trainees' written work and indicates marking to be fair and accurate. However, this does not extend to the moderation of the outcomes of trainees' teaching practice. Arrangements to monitor and evaluate the contribution of mentors remain under-developed. The appointment of a new mentor coordinator is intended to address this issue.